

Adult Education and Literacy Reorganization Narrative Description

Kentucky's tradition in providing innovative, high-quality adult education and literacy services can be documented over time. Prior to 1990, adult education services were offered through the Kentucky Department of Education. With the passage of the Kentucky Education Reform Act in 1990, adult education was transferred to the Cabinet for Workforce Development, where greater connections with training and employment services could be achieved. In 1993, the program was further strengthened by the merger of adult education programs with the community-based programs offered through local literacy councils; thereby creating the Department for Adult Education and Literacy within the Cabinet. The Department was headed by a Commissioner appointed by the Governor.

Significant progress was made in program delivery during the 1990's—specifically the establishment of comprehensive services in every county in Kentucky offering adult basic education, GED preparation, and English as a Second Language. A few programs were funded to provide family literacy services as well. Kentucky was one of the first states to create a Division for Workforce Investment to work directly with employers to provide basic education and computer literacy at work locations across the Commonwealth. But these innovations were not enough.

The National Adult Literacy Survey of 1994 and the Kentucky Adult Literacy Survey issued in 1997 reported that one million Kentuckians, or 40 percent of the working age population, functioned at the two lowest levels of literacy, yet only five percent of the target population was participating in adult education programs. Bold action was needed. As a first step, the General Assembly appropriated two million dollars in both 1998 and 1999 to stimulate innovation and best practice in the field with the goal to produce replicable models that would increase statewide enrollment.

The next step was the creation of the Adult Education and Literacy Task Force in 1998-99. With Governor Paul E. Patton serving as chairman, a group of legislators, educators, government and business leaders solicited testimony from citizens and other interested parties. The Task Force report was completed in 1999, forming the basis for Senate Bill 1, The Adult Education Act of 2000.

With the passage of Senate Bill 1, the Council on Postsecondary Education assumed the responsibility for policy and budget, as well as the development of a 20-year strategy to improve the educational attainment of low-skilled Kentuckians in partnership with the Department for Adult Education and Literacy. In November 2000, the Council approved the adult education action agenda including aggressive goals to increase enrollment from 51,000 in 2000 to 100,000 in 2004. Since 2000, enrollment has increased 69 percent. The goal of 100,000 students may be achieved in 2003, one year ahead of schedule.

Clearly, the partnership with the Council on Postsecondary Education has made a significant difference. Kentucky continues to lead the nation in innovative practices in adult education. Family literacy programs are now offered in every Kentucky county. Workplace education reached more than 22,000 employees in 2001-02, up from 11,000 the previous year. The creation of the nation's first adult education distant education program, www.kyvae.org, has resulted in more than 4,000 adults learning online from the convenience of their homes, public libraries, and their place of work. A two-year public communication campaign in conjunction with GEAR UP and postsecondary education urged record numbers of adults to take the GED test in preparation for postsecondary education and training. The on-to-postsecondary rate for GED graduates has also increased from 12 percent for the 1998 group to 18 percent for the 2000 graduates.

Although we have made great progress, there is much yet to do in order to reach the 2010 enrollment goal of 300,000 learners. Content standards must be aligned with entrance requirements for postsecondary education through our P-16 initiatives. Adult education instructors must be part of the teacher quality initiatives. The on-to-postsecondary rate must improve to at least 40 percent to ensure adults have the skills needed to compete in the knowledge-based economy. And greater coordination with the Kentucky Community and Technical College System is essential to coordinate workforce development efforts.

The challenge to reach 100 percent proficiency for all adult Kentuckians can best be achieved by bringing all adult education services and funds under one agency. There is a need to closely integrate adult education services with the traditional postsecondary education system, particularly with the community and technical colleges. By placing adult education programs under the postsecondary education umbrella, education services for all adults can be better coordinated and more people can be reached. This can be accomplished while maintaining the diversity of the provider network including local boards of education, literacy councils, universities, and KCTCS institutions offering services to a wide array of learners from non-readers, to English as a Second Language, to employees wanting to retain or upgrade their jobs, to those seeking a GED for advancement on to postsecondary education. Kentucky adult education is more than the GED. Kentucky adult education prepares adults for the future—for continuing education, for employment, for family. As stated by the Council on Postsecondary Education mission, One Mission—Better Lives.